

## The 2020-21 Season in unprecedented times

This has been a season of ins and outs, lockdowns and unlocks, phases and protocols and a great quantities of soapy water and hand-sanitiser.

It is heartwarming to see how the club weathered the Covid storm this year. This time last year we had our first Zoom AGM and were embarking on a major clean-up ready to reopen the socially-distanced gym. With SuperSaas becoming everyone's number one bookmark, we were doing more single sculling than ever and looking forward to crew boats in August, some of us more desperately than others. In the meantime the Para squad were completing marathon ergs on the balcony and the Senior Men were cycling 150 miles to mark the start of our 150th Anniversary. Over the summer, we managed to work our way through the labyrinthine government and British Rowing regulations to enable re-designed adult and junior Learn to Row courses to happen. And more importantly, Laura and Jenny managed to open the bar for restricted events. Come September, we had the majority of the club back on the water and celebrated with a club Time Trial below the lock. With no proper racing in sight over the winter we organised more time trials and private matches with local clubs. Our hopes for normality didn't last long and by November we were back on Zoom, working with Time Team for weekend ergo virtual racing events and totting up every kilometre run, ridden or rowed on Strava. A brief return to the river before Christmas then led straight into Lockdown 3, which felt longer than ever in the dark winter months with only an erg for company. We survived through the efforts of the squad leads, coaches and members who motivated and supported each other throughout. Some might say we emerged stronger. And we finally got round to launching the new website.

There is much to report from our squads this season:

Juniors:

In the Junior section, we said farewell to Penny Thatcher and welcomed Peter Chambers and Katerina Kleshneva to take on the girls' and boys' performance squads respectively, with Enya Lyons staying on until her new job with the police began. There has been a marked upswing in numbers, thanks especially to the JLTR courses led by Enya and team and the hard work of the Junior Development Squad (JDS) and J14 Squad coaches in bringing the new recruits into the sport with such enthusiasm and expertise. We have a fine team of volunteer coaches and parent helpers co-ordinated by Mark Ruinet and Mike Parsons, expertly supported by our Junior Rep and admins Dave Brindle, Monika Bagga and Lai Ching Brindle.

Seniors:

Matt Evans still hasn't had the chance to run a full Senior programme in a normal season. Retention and recruitment was always going to be challenging, and even more so without access to a traditional training environment and racing programme. I'm pleased to report that the Senior Performance Squad has developed successfully despite the lockdowns, particularly on the women's side, with many more athletes now following the full programme, gaining strength, fitness and countless PBs along the way. We were also happy to welcome ex-Juniors and university students into our U-23 Champ group. Once again, the senior squads only run well with the help of our fantastic volunteers: all season, come rain, hail, thunder or shine, assistant coach Alex Morris was there to support Matt and the athletes; and as we came out of the last lockdown, Sam McCoriston and Russ Haley gave extra coaching support to our summer racing crews.

Masters and Young Vets:

With Masters Men's and Women's coaching provided by Nick K-B and the Young Vets programme led by Imogen, the Masters squads have retained most of their members this season. Squads reorganised their training programmes to take account of restricted access to boating and gym equipment and were enthusiastic participants in the various Strava competitions and Round the World challenges. A good number have returned to Masters racing with enthusiasm and success. We had a small but competitive showing at National Masters and Henley Masters, although it may take time for some to return to racing confidently. Thank you to the squad reps Helen, Jayne, Phil and Mike for their leadership and organisation all season.

ALTR/Development/Improvers:

After years of giving many hours a week to coaching Improvers, David Plaskitt stepped back at the end of last season. He was a hard act to follow. Such that we have had to bring in more

coaches and restructure our pathways from adult LTR to racing or Rec squads. Mike Landers and Lisa Knill have risen to the challenge of bringing groups of adult learners through sculling, sweep and coxing programmes, as well as involving a team of newer coaches who are gaining valuable experience working together. Helen Thompson continues to be our first point of contact and organisational supremo for adults joining the programme. We have also trained up a significant number of extra RYA2 qualified launch drivers to give support across the club.

The Recreational group coordinated by Jeremy and Bev have spent most of the year being unable to row or train together, so it is heartening to see how many members have been returning to the water to enjoy outings in boats large and small. They recently ventured out of town to join the Thames Valley Explorers League event and plan further social excursions over the summer.

The Para Squad continued to be beacon of excellence this season, both indoors and out, when they were finally allowed back on the water. Several members enjoyed competitive success in virtual competitions during lockdowns, new recruits began arriving as the summer progressed, we began our pioneering Supported 4+ programme and we were delighted to be the hosts of the first regatta racing for adaptive athletes this season. Thanks again to Bruce Lynn and his team of coaches and support rowers for striving to bring adaptive rowing to as many people as possible. On the international stage, our very own Kingsley Ijomah heads off to Tokyo shortly to compete at the Paralympic Games. We will be cheering him on and wishing him every success.

The Oldies have had a tough year with isolation imposed on them early on and lack of access to the social side of the club. Most of them are now fully vaccinated and back in action. We were delighted to see Laurie Tilbury representing them in the 150th anniversary flotilla in May. John Stephenson continues to provide us with all manner of repairs, storage solutions and general advice on fixing anything. He had less to do during lockdown, but that didn't stop him turning up to make sure everything in the boathouse was shipshape.

Mike will give more detail on the capital plan and the funding we have channelled into developing the fleet and future-proofing the boathouse, but suffice to say, the club account is in a healthy state and we were able to offer a discount on this season's fees to show appreciation for the ongoing support of the whole membership. It has been a very difficult year for many people and I'm glad to say that where members were in need of a helping hand, the Captain's Fund was able to provide financial assistance with fees. We also had to find new ways to keep in touch with everyone. Julie, our Welfare officer organised a team of volunteers to call members isolating at home, coaches ran Zoom ergo and circuit sessions, we had online yoga and coffee mornings. We did our best to continue to be a club for everyone.

So, to racing. As all you avid readers of Splash will know, there has been an optimistic calendar of Race Dates printed every week, with none actually happening for real until the end of May. We kicked off with a huge entry and six medals at Nat Schools, and one at Junior Sculling Regatta. At Metropolitan Regatta the Senior Performance squads achieved our biggest ever entry, alongside five of our junior crews, with all 72 athletes making the A or B finals. On the same weekend that the E4x won gold at National Masters, Marlow International, including a special J14/J15 Sunday event, saw another record entry from the juniors and seniors and further medals. Then it was our turn to host Marlow Town Regatta. We put on a superb event, according to all the feedback from competitors! Plus we entered 126 rowers of our own and saw great racing and winning from our Juniors, Masters, YV and Para squads. Henley Women's Regatta followed on straight away with our largest ever entry of 36 rowers and scullers. Sadly Covid isolation rules hit the Women's Aspirational 8+ and forced a last-minute line-up change in the Women's Aspirational 4-. Everybody qualified and our crews made 5 quarter-finals, 2 semis, 2 finals and the victorious J16 4x brought home the Nina Padwick trophy. Henley Royal is of course postponed to August, but once again we expect to see a healthy entry from Marlow from the Senior Men, Senior Women and Junior Squads across the regatta events. Thank you to our professional coaches and all their volunteer supporters for getting us this far.

It has been an unprecedented year in so many ways, and yet we have so much to celebrate. For me, it is not just about seeing our Cardinal Red kit all over the most prestigious regattas. My other highlight of the year is here at home, where we managed to pull off the first river regatta in the region in the face of so many obstacles. Most other events have been postponed and then

cancelled, apart from those at large sites such as Dorney or Holme Pierrepont. With a dedicated organising committee and a whole host of willing volunteers, we came together as a club and created a racing event to be proud of, giving something special to the rowing community as well as showing ourselves how good we can be. After all we have gone through, I think we can look forward with positivity to the coming season.